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From Your Commissioner...

Candia Elementary School Celebrates Agriculture

The first day of May was Agriculture Day at Candia's Henry W. Moore School. The sun shone brightly on the full day of carefully planned educational activities offered to every class in grades K-6. Students met calves, a team of 4-H pulling steers, alpacas, sheep, goats, chickens, ducks, turkeys, and a pony—and the people who own and work with all these animals.

Children saw lumber sawn into boards and timbers for building barns. They learned about raising sheep for meat and wool. After watching shepherd Jeff Gordon shear a sheep, students were treated to spinning demonstrations by members of the Chamberlain family, and then made their own felted wool crafts with Lauri and Liz Conrad.

Students learned about how people raise and use goats in different environments and cultures; greenhouse production of flower and vegetable plants; beekeeping and honey production; watersheds and landscape; wildlife of a pond; gardening for butterflies; how tree farming supports a healthy environment; how hay is made; and how to care for horses, poultry, pigs, and rabbits. Barnstead farrier Bud Carpenter and apprentice Andy Howe—a Moore School alumnus—made horseshoes and explained how they care for horses' hooves.

Health teacher and Candia resident Nancy Maloney spearheaded the team of teachers and community volunteers that organized the event. All activities and presentations were tailored to state curricular expectations for health, science, and social studies. Judi Lindsey, math teacher in the school's gifted and talented program and a member of Candia's Conservation Commission, Open Space Committee, and Planning Board, was also involved. People from Candia, other area towns, and from UNH Cooperative Extension Master Gardener and 4-H programs, brought animals, demonstrations and exhibits. The emphasis was on hands-on learning—and on discovering the agriculture and natural heritage of their own community of Candia.

Carol Howe brought several of her Southdown sheep and examples of products made from wool. She also brought plants and supplies from her greenhouse business and had kids planting marigolds.

Candia Heritage Commission Chair Diane Philbrick set up and presented a demonstration on hay-making, as well as bringing a pair of Brown Swiss calves. Her grandchildren demonstrated their skills with one of their 4-H pulling steer teams. "Candia's heritage is farming," Philbrick stressed.

School Principal Bob St.Cyr noted that Nancy Maloney had created this idea on her own, and put much effort into recruiting local farmers and resource people. "It's an amazing day, and it all relates to grade level expectations in health and other disciplines," he said. The school's weekly newsletter to parents reported the event was so successful that many staff members had suggested it should be made an annual event.

Candia's Agriculture Day was organized in learning stations on school grounds. Classes were scheduled to rotate through the learning stations, with presenters prepared for each grade. Beekeeper Kathleen Kuhn, for example, presented a different lesson for each grade level—from bee dances to pollination to harvesting honey and relevant state laws.

New Hampshire Ag in the Classroom is revamping its programs with a focus very similar to the Moore School's approach of coordinating closely with the state curricular grade level expectations. The Candia event is an inspiring example of the potential for school-community collaboration in education about agriculture.

Lorraine Merrill, Commissioner